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Sephardim, Ashkenazim and Non-Jewish Peoples: Encounters Across Europe

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The Portrayal of Muslims and Christians in the Traditional Sephardic Tales of Northern Morocco[1]

Abstract

The article analyzes the representation of Muslims and Christians in the folktales of the Sephardic Jews of northern Morocco. The stories are selected from the collection of Arcadio de Larrea Palacín, *Cuentos populares de los judíos del norte de Marruecos*, published in 1952 and 1953. A very brief historical background of Moroccan Jews will be given in order to better understand the perception that the Jews, as a minority group, had of their Muslim and Christian neighbours. This perception is based on the historical and emotional memory of the Jews as well as their daily coexistence with the other religious groups. We also examine how the tales fulfill an essential function of folklore, which is to preserve and reinforce the collective identity and moral values of the narrating group.

Key words: Sephardic tales, northern Morocco, portrayal Muslims and Christians.

[1] I am indebted to my son, Benjamin Librowicz, for revising the English manuscript of this paper.

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1. Introduction

In Western literature, when we think of the other, the image that comes to mind most often is the Jew. Having had the longest experience of exile, the Jew is the very prototype of the other, the alien, the one who is viewed as not fully belonging in the society in which he lives (see Rodrigue, 2010).

Storytelling has always played a central role in the formation and perpetuation of group identity. Stories teach a group its distinct origins, habits, customs, and values. They often contrast them with those of other groups, reinforcing the group's own sense of particularity.

In this article I will examine how the Sephardic Jews of northern Morocco, as members of a minority group living under the Spanish Protectorate (1912-1956), defined through storytelling, the other two major identity groups of that region: the Arab Muslims, who constituted the majority of the local population, and the Spanish Christians who were also a minority. However, the Spaniards held political sovereignty over the territory, having colonized it in the 19th century and acquired it formally, by a treaty with France in 1912.

The source material I will analyze will be 15 tales that portray interactions between Jews and Muslims or Christians, taken from the anthology of traditional Sephardic tales compiled by Arcadio de Larrea Palacín.[2] Notwithstanding its poor editorial skills, its inaccurate transcriptions of the texts and its lack of a scholarly apparatus, this collection is extremely valuable as it contains the richest and most abundant fieldwork of the traditional Sephardic narrative ever undertaken in that area.[3] These tales bear witness to the interaction, harmonious or conflictual between Muslims and Jews, on the one hand, and Christians and Jews, on the other. Throughout this analysis there emerges the Jewish perception of Muslims and Christians and also the view that the Jews have of themselves.

I believe that the historical circumstances that led to the settling of Jews in Tetuán in 1492, as well as the subsequent five centuries during which they lived in that city have greatly influenced their vision of their countrymen.

This study is based on the concept of identity as defined by Alex Mucchielli. In his view, the identity of a group or an individual is constructed in a complex way, based on one or more of the following four categories

[2] See Larrea Palacín, 1952, 1953. Volume I contains tales # 1-89 and volume II tales # 90–156.

[3] I should mention another collection, less copious, but edited with care and scholarship, that of Juan Martínez Ruiz, *Textos judeo-españoles de Alcazarquivir, 1948-1951* (see Martínez Ruiz, 1963).

of referents: material and physical, historical, psychocultural and psychosocial (Mucchielli, 2011, pp. 41–43). In this analysis, the historical referent will be of prime importance.

Therefore, we will first highlight some key events in the history of the Jews of Tetuán, that have an impact on the representation of the other. Tetuán, being the largest and most important city in the Spanish Protectorate, will be taken as the prototype of other cities in that area: Larache, Alcazarquivir, Arcila, Chauen, and to a certain extent Tangier, even though the latter constitutes a particular case, given its international status at the time.[4]

Although this article will focus exclusively on the Sephardic tales of Morocco, whenever these tales have their counterpart in the Balkan Sephardic tradition, we will provide their code and title in Reginetta Haboucha's collection (1992), so as to expand the scope of this research for the benefit of our readers. No study of Sephardic folktales would be complete without the excellent book of Tamar Alexander-Frizer (see Alexander-Frizer, 2008).

2. A Brief Historical Overview (1492-1956)

Jews first settled in Tetuán in 1489, but not in significant numbers until after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. The trauma of that experience gave rise to a contorted and paradoxical attitude toward the Spanish: a longing to return combined with resentment. By contrast, the generosity of Wattasid-dynasty Morocco towards the *megorashim* (Spanish Jewish exiles) engendered a deep feeling of gratitude. In this paper, I will analyze how those feelings evolved four centuries later.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Jews of Tetuán lived in relative harmony with their Muslim countrymen. Nevertheless, their status as *dhimmis* (a protected minority in a Muslim country) made their situation precarious, as their position depended to a great extent on the fickle and unpredictable favour of the sovereign.

Over the course of the 18th century, however, their situation deteriorated considerably, as the Kingdom of Morocco became increasingly politically and economically unstable. The Jews were subjected to higher and higher

[4] In 1925, the Société des Nations (SDN), based in Geneva (Switzerland), gave Tangier the status of international city and free zone, which greatly enhanced the cultural and socio-economic aspect of the city. In 1956, when Morocco became independent, Tangier lost its status and declined considerably. Nowadays it has recovered its prestige and has become one of the major seaports in Morocco.

taxes and the impoverished community had to resort to begging for emergency financial assistance from their coreligionists in other Moroccan cities (Fes in 1704 and 1749) and even abroad (Italy in 1738 and 1750) (see Israel Garzón, 2005, pp. 22, 24).

During this time, the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Tetuán degraded considerably (see the testimony of a Spanish traveller in 1767 in Israel Garzón, 2005, p. 25). This vexing situation culminated in the ransacking of the *judería* (Jewish quarter) of Tetuán in 1790 by the Kabyle troops of Sultan Muley Yazid (1790-1792), who raped and murdered many of its inhabitants in a night of terror (Israel Garzón, 2005, p. 25). The Jewish quarter was subsequently expropriated by the state and the sultan built the great Yema'a el Kbira mosque in 1807. That year the Jews were given permission to build a new quarter in a different part of the city.

The first half of the 19th century did not bring any significant improvement in the situation of the Jews of Tetuán. Many of them moved to Tangier after the 1790 pillage. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries Tetuán's Jews emigrated to Gibraltar (after its capture by Anglo-Dutch forces in 1704), London and the British colonies worldwide (Israel Garzón, 2005, p. 23). In 1859, prior to the arrival of the invading Spanish troops in the city, about 4,000 Jews left Tetuán for Gibraltar, Oran (Algeria), Lisbon and southern Spain (see Leibovici, 1984, pp. 15-26).

According to Manuel Ortega, in the second half of the 19th century, in spite of the many decrees by the Sultan to stop discrimination against Jews, and numerous diplomatic intercessions by European governments (Britain, France, and Spain) and by the Baron de Rothschild and Sir Moses Montefiore, the situation of the Jews remained dismal (Ortega, 1929, pp. 106-111).

Two events brought major transformations to the lives of the Jews of Tetuán: the first was the Hispano-Moroccan War of 1859-1860, followed by the establishment of the Spanish Protectorate five decades later (1912-1956) with Tetuán as its capital; the second, the opening of the first Alliance Israélite Universelle school (AIU) in Tetuán in 1862. Both were key events in the history of the city's Jewish community as they directly exposed it to two European peoples and cultures: the French and the Spanish.

The Jews welcomed the arrival of the Spaniards with optimism and hope. They considered them liberators rather than colonizers, since they gave Jews civil rights and allowed them to live outside of the Jewish quarter (Ortega, 1929, pp. 110–111). From then on they shared the *Ensanche*, the European section of the city, with the Spanish Christians, while the Muslims lived mostly in the *Medina*, the rest of the city. The topography of Tetuán is interestingly shown in postcards and old engravings (cf. Abensur, 2010).

It is significant that Muslims were called *goyim* by the Jews (the generic name given by Jews to non-Jews) whereas Christian Spaniards were called *shakhenim* (neighbours), reflecting their geographical, linguistic, and cultural proximity to Jews.[5] When the first Spaniards arrived in northern Morocco after 1859, they discovered a Jewish community that had much in common with them: language, cuisine, a repertoire of traditional songs known as *romances*, Spanish proverbs or *refranes*, and similar cultural values (such as the importance of honour or *honra*).

When Larrea Palacín conducted his fieldwork, the Jewish community of Tetuán found itself at a crossroads, at a decisive moment of its history, resulting from four decades of Spanish colonization and almost a century of French education, drawn by the current of modernity brought by the physical presence of the Spaniards and the prestige of French education, but at the same time, profoundly attached to its traditions and proud of having been the cradle of distinguished rabbis and scholars.

After this historical and cultural overview, I will examine how Muslims and Christians are viewed throughout the traditional tales collected by Larrea Palacín. I will observe how the construction of the other's identity is based on prosaic elements as well as others that are removed from everyday reality and which belong to another realm: to history and myth, anchored in the community's collective memory and enriched by the people's imagination.

3. The Perception of the Arab Muslim

In Larrea Palacín's (LP) two volumes we find 11 tales where the relations between Muslims and Jews constitute the main theme of the story.[6] The Arab Muslim is always referred to as "el moro" (the Moor), and he is portrayed as one of four archetypes: an authority figure, a wicked and vindictive character, a seducer/imposter and an envious individual. In some tales there are characters that belong to two of these categories. He

[5] Professor Yaakov Bentolila of Ben Gurion University, born in Tetuán, suggested to me that the term *shakhenim* may have originated in the fact that, after the Spanish victory in Tetuán (1859), Spain placed its soldiers in Jewish homes in the *judería*, the Jewish quarter, since it considered it a safe place for them. Therefore, the Spanish soldiers became neighbours of the Jews. Naturally, this situation displeased Jewish parents who had young daughters and distrusted the young soldiers, who had become their unwelcome guests.

[6] LP5 *El hajam y el rey*; LP7 *La reina* infiel; LP17 *El traje embrujado*; LP25 *El falso haján*; LP69 *Los tres hajamim*; LP74 *La venganza*; LP77 *Yohah*; LP98 *El pretendiente vengativo*; LP140 *Las tres pruebas del jalifa*; LP149 *Maimónides*; LP151 *La fe del haján*. Note that the spelling of the Hebrew word חָכָם varies in Larrea's book (*hajam, haján)*. It is transcribed here as it appears in his collection.

may also be represented as a more sympathetic figure in the tales of Joha, who is, enigmatically, both an ingenious trickster and a naïve simpleton.

3.1. **An authority figure** (LP5, LP7, LP69, LP140, LP149 and LP151). In *El hajam y el rey* (#5),[7] the Muslim king appears as the confidant and protector of a Jewish sage, who is destined by fate to steal in order to feed his family. It is worth noting that the sage, who is a pious man, only steals an insignificant amount of money, which in Jewish law is not considered theft in legal terms. The king, disguised as an Arab commoner, gives money to the Jew so that the latter would no longer have to steal. But, paradoxically, he encourages the Jew to burglarize the viceroy during the feast he was throwing in honour of his daughter's engagement. At the feast, the Jew overhears the viceroy plotting to assassinate the king and usurp the throne. Shocked and frightened, he scurries home without stealing anything from the viceroy's house. The sage is guided by the *mishnaic* principle of fealty to the monarch and respect for the laws of the land.[8] Emulating Mordechai in the *Book of Esther*, he longs to tell the king about the plot but, seized by the age-old Jewish fear of civil authority and fearing for his life, he wavers and, instead, tells his Muslim friend who is none other than the king in disguise.[9] His friend asks the sage if he would tell the king about the plot, should he be summoned to the palace. The next day, the king sends for the Jew, who confesses that he heard the viceroy plotting to kill him. The king rewards him with a large sum of money for saving his life and so that he would not be obliged to steal. He then orders the viceroy to be executed and gives his house to the sage, a motif borrowed from the story of *Purim,* when King Achashverosh gives Haman's house to the Jew Mordechai.

La reina infiel (#7)[10] focuses on a similar theme: a Jewish girl reveals to the king that his wife is unfaithful to him and the mother's reaction betrays

[7] In English, *The Wise Man and the King.* In this tale, there is an ambiguity concerning the true identity of the king, as it is not clearly stated that he is a Muslim.

[8] The custom in synagogues to pray for the well-being of the government and the integrity of its representatives stems from the warning found in *Pirke Avot 3:2 (The Ethics of the Fathers)*: "Pray for the integrity of the government; for were it not for the fear of its authority, a man would swallow his neighbour alive". The theme of loyalty to the government in other Sephardic Moroccan tales is highlighted in Bar-Itzhak & Shenhar, 1993, pp. 184–187.

[9] Cf. *Pirke Avot 1:10:* "Love work, loath mastery over others and avoid intimacy with the government". In this tale, the sage fears for his life. By contrast, the threat that hangs over Jews in Sephardic traditional songs is exile, the fear of being expelled by the monarch, as expressed in the formulaic verse: "Si os han hecho mal judíos los mandaré a desterrare" ("If Jews have harmed you, I will have them expelled").

[10] In English, *The Unfaithful Queen.* See similar tale in Haboucha, 1992, AT871A.

the same ambiguity toward power as the wise Jew of the previous tale: "¡Ay, hija mía, ahora el rey nos mandará matar a las dos!" (cf. Larrea Palacín, 1952, p. 31),[11] to which the daughter answers with the inherent innocence of children: "No nos matará, madre, porque todo esto es verdad".[12]

In *Las tres pruebas del jalifa* (#140)[13] there are two authority figures: the Muslim landlord and the caliph. Both are cruel to the pious Jew, who does not want to desecrate the Sabbath by paying his rent on that day. The landlord dies after denouncing the Jew to the caliph, who blames the Jew for his death and gives him three impossible tests to overcome, on pain of death. Only divine intervention, his will to observe the Sabbath and his faith in God save the Jew from certain death.

Los tres hajamim (#69)[14] highlights a similar theme: the cruelty of the Muslim minister who kills three Jews who cannot answer his greeting because they are praying and, by contrast, the king's righteousness. After the murder of the three Jews, the king cannot eat or drink because he is prevented from doing so by three doves, the incarnation of the murdered Jews' souls. The king asks his ministers to explain this situation and the ministers say that only the Jews would be able to solve this mystery. The king summons a Jewish sage; but it is the latter's infant daughter who miraculously reveals the identity of the killer. The king renders justice by having the minister executed.

Likewise *La fe del haján* (#151)[15] shows the equanimity of the king who sentences to death a group of envious Muslims who attempt to discredit the Jewish community by stealing a box of diamonds that the Jews wanted to give the king as a gift in order to prove their loyalty to the monarch in a time of crisis. This story is a variant of a Talmudic tale set in Roman times.[16] However, in the Talmudic story the Jew is saved through the intercession of Elijah the prophet. It is interesting to note the transposition of the story to a different socio-historical context: in the Tetuán story, Caesar's court is replaced by a sultan's court and the Roman villains are turned into *moros* (Arabs).[17]

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[11] "Alas, my daughter, now the King will have us both killed!"

[12] "He will not kill us, mother, because it is the whole truth".

[13] In English, *The Caliph's Tests.* See similar tale in Haboucha, 1992, **792 *Impossible Tasks Imposed Because of Refusal to Desecrate the Sabbath.*

[14] In English, *The Three Rabbis.* See similar tale in Haboucha, 1992, **780E *Justice by Supernatural Means.*

[15] In English, *The Rabbi's Faith*. See similar tale in Haboucha, 1992, **779D* *The Sacred Earth.*

[16] See *The Babylonian Talmud. Taanit 21a* and Haboucha's commentary; Haboucha, 1992, pp. 264–265.

[17] This theme is recorded in Aarne-Thompson under AT 50G*C and AT*730.

The tale ends with the declaration by the Muslim king that "No hay ley más santa que la ley hebrea",[18] an affirmation that sounds quite implausible and seems to reflect the subjective point of view of the narrator.

In conclusion, the traits attributed to the king, quite varied and at times contradictory (kindness, cruelty, compassion, even-handedness, arbitrariness…), seem to faithfully mirror a concrete historical experience. Tetuán Jewry, having lived for more than four centuries (1492-1912) under Muslim rule, undoubtedly kept a collective memory of the vicissitudes of that experience. They were aware that their individual and collective fate depended not so much on the law, scarcely applied, but rather on the disposition of the monarch toward Jews, and this was fickle and unpredictable at best. As an illustration, under the reign of Muley Ismail (1672-1727), Tetuán and its Jewish inhabitants lived under relative economic prosperity whereas Muley Yazid (1790-1792), in his short reign, left sinister recollections of dreadful poverty and persecution in the memories of the people of Tetuán.

3.2. Wicked and vindictive (LP69, LP140, LP151). The lesser characters in these tales, already mentioned in # 3.1.: the landlord, the minister and an unspecified group of commoners are evil and vengeful, unlike the royal figure who is portrayed in a much more positive light. This seems to reflect the historical experience of Tetuán Jewry in the 19th century, when the demeaning and discriminatory behaviour toward Jews came more from the populace than from the authorities. It is significant to note that the wicked intentions of those individuals are manifested precisely when Jews fulfill a divine commandment (Friday night prayer in the first tale and observance of the Sabbath in the second) or their duty as faithful subjects of the king (in the third).

3.3. Seducer and impostor (LP17, LP25, LP74 and LP98). The common theme of these four tales is the seduction of a Jewish woman by a Muslim man through a ruse.

El traje embrujado (#17)[19] tells the story of how a Muslim merchant, who wanted to sleep with a married Jewish woman, sells her husband a bewitched dress. When the wife puts on the dress for the first time on Yom Kippur, she loses her mind, along with all her inhibitions. The Muslim man takes advantage of the situation, drags the woman to his house and feeds her, although Yom Kippur is a solemn day of fast.

[18] "There is no holier law than Jewish Law".

[19] In English, *The Bewitched Dress.* See Haboucha, 1992, ***883 *Attempted Seduction Thwarted and Punished.*

The last three tales, *El falso haján* (#25),[20] *La venganza* (#74),[21] *El pretendiente vengativo* (#98),[22] are variants on the same theme: a Muslim man falls in love with the rabbi's daughter; the girl rejects him and the young man leaves town; years later he comes back and pretends to be a pious Jew; he marries the young woman and they have three sons; one day, the wife discovers that her husband is a Muslim and so are her children. She tells her father, and both ask for God's help.

Should a remotely similar situation occur in real life, a Jew would know that he has limited legal recourse since, according to Muslim religious law, the children bear the religion of their father; by contrast, Jewish law stipulates that religion is passed through the mother. Therefore, in our tales, the woman can only resort to asking God for help. In the three tales, God punishes the father and the children in a spectacular way: their house collapses over them and they die.

In the 1950s, when Larrea Palacín conducted his fieldwork in northern Morocco, the social barriers between Jews, Muslims and Christians were less rigid than in previous decades and there were occurrences of romances among youngsters of different faiths. In those rare instances, folktales would act as the defenders of the Jewish community's values. They would warn young people of the danger they faced, thus fulfilling one of the basic functions of folklore, as defined by William Bascom (1965): "validating culture… justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them". It is worth noting that in the first tale, the husband has a shop in a well-known main street of the Arab quarter of Tetuán ("la Calle Comercio"), making the narrative more realistic and plausible.

Let us mention that one of the most enduring taboos in traditional societies is interfaith sexual relations. In that respect, the Sephardic communities of Morocco as well as those of the Balkans are no different. Parents feared that their daughters could be seduced by a Christian or a Muslim man, as this was considered a dishonour that would bring shame to the entire family circle. These tales express a deep-seated concern.

3.4. Envious (LP149 *Maimónides*).[23] This story deals with a theme that is often found in the corpus of legends attributed to the great medieval sage and to Jewish folktales in general: the jealousy aroused by the fame of a Jew

[20] In English, *The False Pious Jew.*

[21] In English, *The Revenge.*

[22] In English, *The Vengeful Suitor.* The three tales are identified in Haboucha, 1992 as *730A *Moor as Impostor Marries Jewess.*

[23] Haboucha, 1992, AT 922A *Achikar.* See tale # 43 *El ciego de nacimiento* (Blind from Birth) in Alexander & Romero, 1988, pp. 121-123.

or his outstanding position in the royal palace. The jealous one's calumny aims to cause the misfortune or death of the object of his jealousy. In the end, the deception of the wicked is revealed, and the Jewish doctor and scholar is vindicated. The listener experiences a beneficial catharsis with a denouement that satisfies the thirst for justice of a persecuted minority.

3.5. Yohah (PL77)[24] is the only story about the famous character *Joha* or *Ch'a*, well-known throughout the Arabo-Islamic countries and Turkey (see Koén-Sarano, 2003; Nahum, 1998). The *Joha* stories are the most popular among Sephardim and, in northern Morocco, they were always told in *haketía*, the vernacular Judeo-Spanish language used by the Jews of that area, whereas the other stories were told in a more modern Spanish, closer to that of the collector. The fact that Larrea collected just a single story of *Joha* might be due to the fact that the Spaniards in Morocco mocked *haketía*, which they considered an incorrect and inferior language and the Jews themselves interiorized this bias, and many of them refrained from speaking their mother tongue in public, opting instead for the standard Spanish brought by the Spaniards to Morocco. The collector, a Spanish Christian, is conscious of this and explains it in his introduction (Larrea Palacín, 1952).[25]

In this tale, *Joha* succeeds in doing what no other folk hero does: he takes revenge on the Muslim who called his donkey "hijo de judío".[26] Incidentally that was a frequent insult in Morocco among Arabs. The tale, collected only among Jews, concludes: "al moro le pegaron y él (Joha) salió ganando".[27]

The stories of Joha, which are always humorous, are exemplary in that they erase differences of faith and beliefs. Laughter is a great human conciliator; it abolishes censorship, resolves tensions, and unites people through one of the most gratifying and universal experiences. In fact, the figure of Joha itself is where Jews, Arabs and Berbers find a commonality. All three groups identify Joha as one of their own. For example, in one story, Joha is supposed to give the sermon in a synagogue or a mosque. It does not really matter. The important thing is how Joha fools the congregants, be they Jews or Muslims.

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[24] Haboucha, 1992, 1538*A *The Jewish Donkey.*

[25] "Débese a que el uso de la "jaquetía" se restringe cada vez más, no sólo en el trato público y con los españoles, sino en el seno mismo de las familias, que lo consideran un lenguaje incorrecto, y creen que los extraños se burlarán de él.", p. v.

[26] In English, son of a Jew.

[27] In English, they hit the Arab and Joha triumphed.

Joha is not the antagonist, the conflicting other; on the contrary, he is our neighbour, our brother, the very mirror where we reflect ourselves, because through him we recognize our humanity. He is that neighbour whom we can love as ourselves, as commanded by Jewish law.[28]

As a professional storyteller, one of my favourite tales is a Hassidic story where a rabbi asks his disciples: "How can we tell at what moment night ends and day dawns?" None of these students knows the right answer until the rabbi says: "It is when we see the face of a stranger, that of a foreigner, and we recognize our brother, it is at that moment that night ends and day dawns".

With the exception of the Joha tales, the image of the Muslim man that emerges from these narrations is clearly threatening and dangerous, since he betrays the Jew or slanders him, kills him without reason, and seduces or deceives his wife or daughter. The Sephardic world of folktales from Morocco as well as that of the Balkans, is decisively Manichean. However, the portrayal of the Muslim king is more nuanced and positive: mostly fair-minded, sometimes cruel. The construction of this image carries the weight of two centuries (18th and 19th) of uneasy coexistence between Arabs and Jews, in which the latter were marginalized and treated as second-class citizens, hardly tolerated by their Muslim neighbours. The memory of the latest pillage of the Jewish quarter (1859) was still vivid among the Jews of Tetuán, who were conscious of their vulnerability, given their status as *dhimmis*.

Viewed in the context of the diaspora, in which Jews had to survive in a hostile milieu, the polarized image of the other in a black and white world should be understood not as a historical account, but rather as a defence mechanism from the narrating community. In these stories, Muslims represent a world of unsettling otherness and its portrayal conveys the historical weight of the oppressor, whose religious beliefs threaten Jewish identity. A preservation instinct is triggered by the encounter with the other, as defined by Fredrick Barth. According to him, an ethnic minority group can preserve its own identity by exercising "ethnic boundary maintenance mechanisms" (Barth, 2008), which act as a protection and defence against foreign influences that threaten its own identity. The perception of the Muslim in the Sephardic narrative of Tetuán exemplifies this theory.

[28] When a neophyte asked the great teacher Hillel (1st century B.C.E.) how he could define Judaism, Hillel famously answered: "Love your neighbour as yourself and the rest is commentary".

4. The Perception of the Spanish Christian

The four tales that bear witness to and best describe the relations between Christians and Jews are interesting in that they portray the Christian Spanish woman in a very positive light.[29] By contrast, in none of the stories of Muslims and Jews do we find any Muslim women. This testifies to the absence of Muslim women in the public sphere, unlike Jewish and Christian women who often interacted in their daily life. These stories, which were told mostly by women, reflect the positive view that Jewish women had of their Spanish counterparts.

El incircunciso (#95)[30] originates in a Talmudic tale set in Roman times and transposed to the 20th century. It depicts a recurrent tragedy in Jewish history, when the national or local authorities prohibited Jews from circumcising their new-born sons. It relates the story of a Jewish woman who is ordered to take her baby son to the royal palace; if the authorities were to find out that the baby had been circumcised, they would kill him. A Spanish friend lends the Jewish woman her own son so that she can take him to the palace instead of the circumcised baby. The palace of the Christian king is a hostile place that represents tyrannical power. It is reminiscent of Pharaoh's palace from the biblical *Book of Exodus*, when a royal decree was issued to kill all the new-born Hebrew males. In this particular tale, the child's father is the king's minister; however, that does not save him from people's enmity, since his own colleagues betray him. The vulnerable position of the Jew is similar to that of Maimonides in the Muslim court of the Fatimid Caliphate (#149) and the king's ministers are portrayed in the same negative way. The hero of the story is the Spanish woman, whose generosity and compassion contrast her with her male counterparts. At the end of the story the king sentences the jealous ministers to death and names his Jewish minister "rey de otro pueblo".[31]

El resucitado por amor (#103) tells an intricate and lengthy love story between a Christian princess and the son of a rabbi, similar in certain regards to that of *Tristan et Iseult* or *Romeo and Juliet*. However, the teaching is definitely Jewish: the story ends with the princess converting to

[29] LP95 *El circunciso* (The uncircumcised); LP103 *El recusitado por amor* (Resurrected by love); LP130 *El candelabro robado* (The stolen chandelier); LP147 *El limonero por testigo* (The lemon-tree as witness). The tales featuring Jews and Christians are fewer in comparison with those that pertain to Jews and Muslims. This may be due to the shorter timespan of coexistence with the Christians and perhaps because the informants hesitated to share those stories with a Christian collector.

[30] Haboucha, 1992, **948 *The King and His Jewish Minister.*

[31] King of another town.

Judaism of her own free will, thereby enabling the marriage of the two main characters. This story, which includes a number of supernatural elements, is documented in Hebrew in a well-known anthology, published in Italy (Farhi, 1902, pp. 37-44), and in English in Bin Gorion's collection (see Bin Gorion, 1976, pp. 1067-1075).[32]

El limonero por testigo (#147)[33] deals with the same theme (a Jew loved by a Christian woman), but in a different vein, as in this story the woman's father kills the Jew for refusing to marry his daughter, because she is not Jewish. Later in the story, the lemons from the father's orchard astonishingly fill with blood, miraculously bearing witness to the crime. The father subsequently confesses his crime and is sentenced to death by the king. The subject matter is the same, but its treatment is completely different: in the first story, after numerous adventures, there is a happy ending, whereas the second story ends tragically. Notably, in both tales, the possibility of a love story between a Christian and a Jew is associated with death. The key difference between them is the depth and sincerity of the king's daughter's love and her conversion to Judaism, which act as redeeming qualities.

Our last tale, *El candelabro robado* (#130)[34] recounts the burlesque story of a very wealthy but greedy Jew, a Sephardic Robin Hood of sorts, who steals a golden chandelier from a church to sell it and distribute the money among the poor, after he hears the priest declare that "El que dé dinero para los pobres, Dios se lo doblará".[35] Even though the story is humorous, it exhibits the age-old threat that the Church represents to Jews: "Y mandó a echar un pregón que si dentro de tres días no aparecía el candelabro de oro, mataría a todos los judíos." threatens the priest, after discovering that the chandelier has gone missing.[36] Catholic priests were familiar figures in the Spanish Protectorate and, being the representatives of a church that had persecuted Jews for centuries, they were not particularly liked by the Jewish population, and were often mocked by them in their folksongs and jokes.[37]

To sum up, the image of the Christian rendered by these tales is sometimes like that of the Muslim and sometimes different. Women are

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[32] Bin Gorion's anthology was initially published in German at the beginning of the 20th century.

[33] Haboucha, 1992, AT960 *The Sun Brings All to Light*.

[34] Haboucha, 1992, 1565*B *The Thief Falsely Claims a Gift from the Virgin*.

[35] "He who gives money to the poor, God will double his wealth" (Larrea Palacín, 1953, p. 172).

[36] "And he (the priest) proclaimed that should the golden chandelier not be brought back, he would kill all Jews" (Larrea Palacín, 1953, p. 172).

37 A paradigmatic example is the bawdy song *Paipero*, sung at Moroccan Sephardic weddings.

portrayed more positively than men and tensions between Jews and Christians manifest themselves in the religious sphere. Notwithstanding their religious beliefs, Sephardic Jews feel more affinity with their Christian Spanish neighbours, with whom they share a common language and many cultural features, than with their Arab Muslim ones. However, they do harbour a certain degree of mistrust, resulting from the memory of the Expulsion and the prevailing antisemitic prejudices that existed among Spaniards.[38]

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that the image of Muslims and Christians in the Sephardic folktales of northern Morocco is neither the product of a philosophical reflection nor a realistic representation and a portrayal subject to political correctness. Like any folkloric manifestation, it is the fruit of a historical experience and, particularly, of the intimate and emotional perception of this experience, at times traumatizing, by a collectivity.

Because it is conveyed by a popular narrative, the stereotyped image of the other fulfills one of the main functions of folklore: to preserve and reinforce one's identity and the integrity of the religious and cultural values of the group through the negative depiction of the other. The polarization of Jews and non-Jews gives a dramatic twist to the narration and furthers the didactic purpose of the story.

The threatening image of the other reveals how the Jews see themselves: as vulnerable and fragile, law-abiding citizens, who put their trust in God and follow His commandments and are frequently the victims of the schemes of Gentiles. Since the construction of a collective identity is complex and fluid, it would be interesting to find out if the above-mentioned characteristics, relative to diaspora Jews, will stay the same in Israel or whether they will evolve to adapt to the new reality of the Jewish people who, for the first time in 2,000 years, find themselves a majority vis-à-vis other religious and ethnic groups.[39] Of course, this study could be done only if the folktales of northern Morocco can be kept alive in Israel; but that is another story.

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[38] The Spaniards exhibited polarized feelings toward the Jews: on the one hand, openness, empathy and affection (cf. Ortega, 1929; Pulido Fernández, 1905); and on the other hand, widespread antisemitic prejudices and disdain (cf. writers Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, Luis Antón del Olmet, Federico García Sanchiz, and many other reporters of the African War (1859-1860) and the Spanish Protectorate).

[39] Haya Bar-Itzhak and Aliza Shendar find interesting variants in the stories collected in Israel from informants of southern Morocco (cf. Bar-Itzhak & Shenhar, 1993, pp. 22–23).

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L'image des musulmans et des chrétiens dans les contes juifs traditionnels du nord du Maroc

Cet article examine la représentation des musulmans et des chrétiens dans les contes traditionnels juifs du nord du Maroc. Les contes sont tirés de la collection de Arcadio de Larrea Palacín**,** *Cuentos populares de los judíos del norte de Marruecos,* publiée en deux volumes en 1952 et 1953. Un bref panorama historique des juifs marocains s'avère nécessaire pour mieux comprendre la perception que les juifs ont de leurs concitoyens musulmans et chrétiens. Dans notre analyse, cette perception se base aussi bien sur la mémoire historique et subjective des juifs que sur la réalité de leur coexistence avec les deux autres groupes religieux. L'on examine également comment ces contes remplissent une fonction essentielle du folklore, soit la préservation et le renforcement de l'identité collective et des valeurs morales du groupe narrateur.

Mots-clés: contes séfarades, Maroc du Nord, représentation des musulman et des chrétiens.

Obraz muzułmanów i chrześcijan w tradycyjnych opowieściach sefardyjskich północnego Maroka

W artykule poddano analizie sposób przedstawienia muzułmanów i chrześcijan w opowieściach Żydów sefardyjskich z północnego Maroka. Opowieści zostały wybrane ze zbioru *Cuentos populares de los judíos del norte de Marruecos*, opracowanego przez Arcadia de Larrea Palacína i opublikowanego w dwóch tomach w 1952 i 1953 r. W celu lepszego zrozumienia sposobu postrzegania chrześcijan i ich muzułmańskich współobywateli konieczne było zwięzłe omówienie tła historycznego dotyczącego Żydów marokańskich. Postrzeganie to oparte było zarówno na historycznej i emocjonalnej pamięci Żydów, jak i na analizie ich faktycznego współistnienia z innymi grupami religijnymi. W tekście badano również, w jaki sposób opowieści spełniają fundamentalne dla folkloru funkcje, to jest zachowanie i wzmocnienie tożsamości zbiorowej oraz wartości moralnych wypowiadającej się grupy.

Słowa kluczowe: opowieści sefardyjskie, północne Maroko, obraz muzułmanów i chrześcijan.

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